

## Clayton Utz

Australian law firm Clayton Utz has collaborated with 3:33 Art Projects to develop a unique new platform for Australian artists; The Clayton Utz Art Partnership. The partnership supports emerging and established artists by hosting regular six-monthly art exhibitions and an Artist-in-Residence program at the firm's Sydney premises.

For each iteration, curator and founder of 3:33 Art Projects Max Germanos will pair two artists at different points in their career, staging their works as individual shows across the different levels of Clayton Utz's Sydney premises. For Germanos, the project casts a dynamic unconventional environment for displaying and viewing art whilst also exposing new audiences to Australian art. "There are lot of people that come through these offices", notes Germanos, "it's a functioning space, it's a space where people spend hours in offices. I want people to live with the art, not to see it for a millisecond in a gallery. It's a platform for new audiences; it's an introduction. And it's a celebration of the artists' works".

Bruce Cooper, Clayton Utz Deputy Chief Executive Partner, recognised the value of Germanos' vision for the Art Partnership and was very quick to get on board: "I had a meeting with Max, and very quickly I could see the potential of this idea across so many levels." According to Cooper, the project has helped to engage clients on a more human level, cutting through the linearity of normal 'business' conversation by provoking interactions out of the ordinary.

The inaugural Art Partnership exhibition features 37 paintings by Wendy Sharpe and 30 artworks by emerging artist Clara Adolphs, displayed throughout the lower and upper office levels respectively. The pairing precipitates parallels between the figurative and painterly practices of both artists whilst also spotlighting their nuanced identities. In the office reception, audiences are greeted with Sharpe's painting *The Witches*, an allegorical interpretation of the enchantresses from Macbeth that garnered attention in 2015 after it was deemed 'inappropriate' by Liberal MP Craig Kelly because of its prominent female buttocks. Cooper welcomes this provocative tenor of Sharpe's works, "What I like is the different conversations people will have about Wendy's work, because sometimes it can be confronting". About *The Witches*, he notes, "We've had someone gently complain about the bare bottom in reception. That was an interesting (if challenging) conversation, because my view was 'thanks for the feedback... we're not going to take it down... and by all means, don't look at it if you don't like it, but lots of people do like it, as do I'".

Sharpe's iconic sensual and boisterous compositions are like the extroverted older sister to Adolphs' subdued, semi-abstracted figures. Inspired by old photographs, Adolphs' paintings evince an air of nostalgia, their muted, mellow tones and unfocused forms creating anonymous portraits of people lingering on the cusp of recognition. Where Adolphs' images are quiet, Sharpe's are loud, and together the works reveal the subjectivity of figuration –

that the human figure is not singular and defined but rather a complex constellation of perceptions. Cooper reflects, “what attracted me to Wendy first was just the vibrancy of her works. It’s absolutely out there, in your face – it’s ‘wow, look at that!’ What attracted me to Clara’s was the complete opposite. Her paintings are subdued, there’s lots of things you can get behind – ‘who is that person?’, ‘what is the context of that?’”

For Adolphs, the Art Partnership represents an important step in the diversification of art exhibiting, “It’s great to show work in another context outside the gallery walls, especially in times of such change within the art industry”. She continues, “my work is exposed to a new audience that may not otherwise come across it, and [the partnership] gives audiences the chance to ‘live’ with the work.” Adolphs’ gallerist, Megan Dick of Mick Fine Art, sees the partnership as a unique opportunity for emerging artists: “As Clara Adolphs is a young artist and has only been exhibiting for five years, it’s an opportunity to present her work to a large number of people who are as yet unaware of her work and are not likely to walk into a gallery to view it.”

Adolphs also participated in the firm's inaugural Artist-in-Residence program, where she has worked regularly from a modified workspace at the Clayton Utz premises. According to Cooper, this initiative was tremendously popular as it offered employees a fascinating glimpse into a creative world so disparate to their own. On the other side, it also exposed Adolphs to a new world: “Being an artist and living rurally, I am so removed from the corporate life of Sydney. I found it interesting heading into that environment to paint; being exposed to another world. It was a beautiful spot to paint (those views!), and great light. I like taking on those challenges, to see how it will affect my work. But I did realise how much my solitude is important to me!”

Renowned for its contemporary design and innovative use of natural light, Clayton Utz’s 1 Bligh Street premises is a fertile setting for the presentations. Designed by Ingenhoven Architekten of Germany and Architectus of Australia, the high-rise building fuses cutting edge architecture and sustainability, with Clayton Utz occupying most of the first 15 floors in a striking fit-out by Bates Smart. “It’s one of the most spectacular settings that you’d see anywhere in the country” notes Germanos, who perceived the partnership of art and design to be a ‘natural fit’.

In addition to its aesthetic virtues, Cooper views the collaboration as an opportunity to make visual art more accessible to staff and clients: “there was a sense of saying to our staff, ‘if you have an interest in art, then here’s some that we can deliver to you’. If you walked pass a gallery and felt scared to go in, because you don’t know what to say, we can bring the gallery to you.” Sharpe’s gallerist Randi Linnegar shares this perspective: “Taking art outside the public and commercial art space provides an opportunity for an entirely new audience. It enables individuals who are time poor to access the visual arts in an

environment that to them is readily accessible. It provides a comfortable, familiar background for viewing and proves that beautiful works of art are at home in many situations.”

Furthering this, Germanos and Cooper hope the partnership will nurture nascent collectors, giving them an entry point into acquiring contemporary Australian art. All works are available to purchase in conjunction with the artist’s galleries, and the decision to include price lists was, for Cooper, “all about making it really accessible... Because if people are interested, they’re going to ask anyway, so why not get it out there upfront and be proud that everything here is for sale”.

Ultimately, by injecting art into the corporate realm, the partnership crosses the ideological threshold from ‘art’ to ‘everyday’, allowing a sector of society oft-removed from all things ‘art’ seamless access into the labyrinth that is the contemporary art world.